

JOHN ASHTON;

OR

THE EMIGRANT.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
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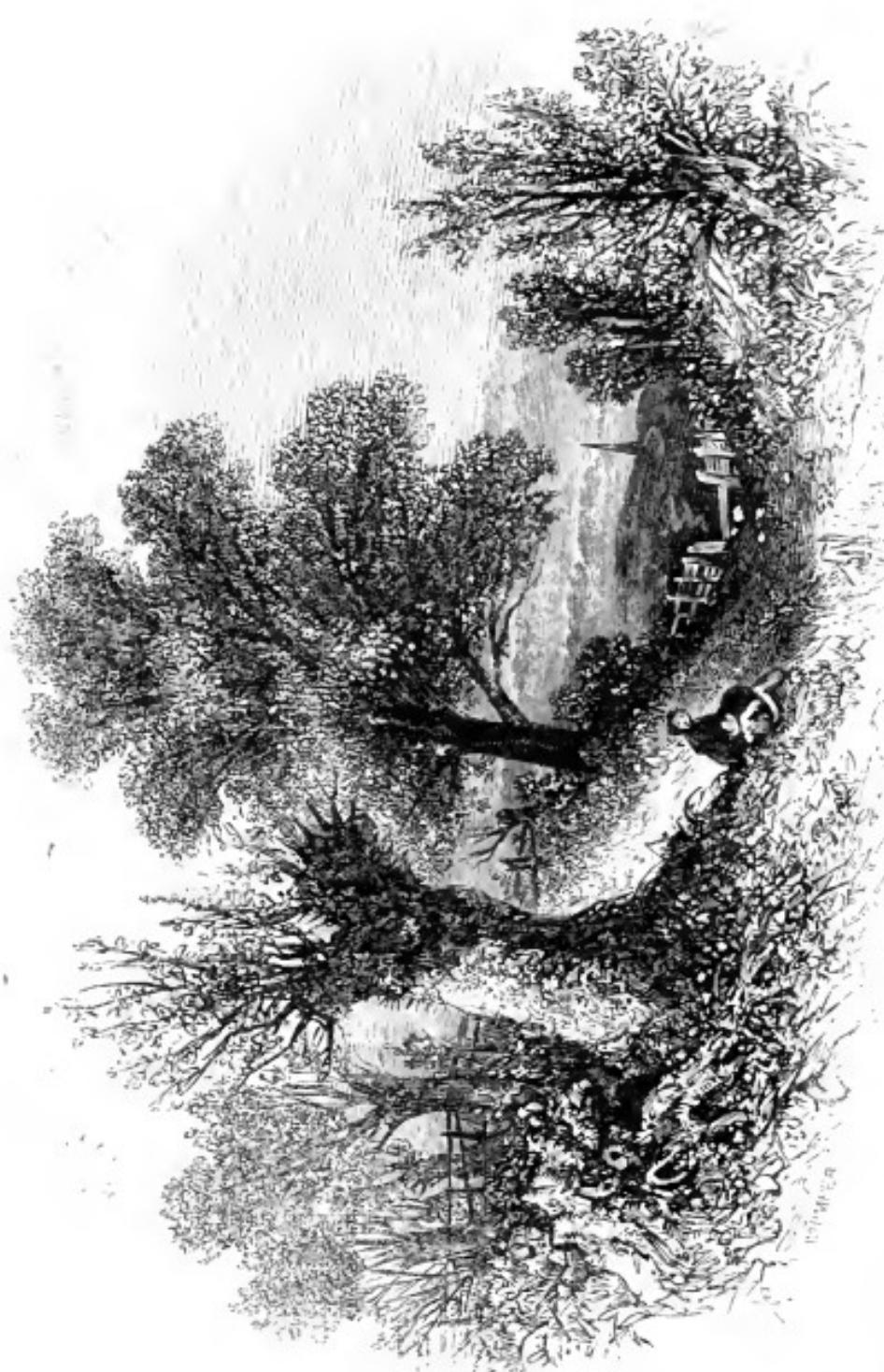
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CHAPTER I.

I WAS sitting in my study, one afternoon last autumn, when the servant opened the door, and announced, "John Ashton."

"John Ashton," I said to myself, during the few moments that elapsed before his appearance, "I don't remember the name. Who can it be?" As soon, however, as he entered the room, I called to mind at once the well-known face of an old friend of my boyhood's days, who had left the village for nearly twenty years, and gone to some far-distant colony, whence now and then we had received some very indefinite news concerning him.

"Why, John," I said, as I advanced towards him, "this is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure; it is now so long since you were among us, that your

old friends had given up all hope of ever seeing you again. And where have you come from? Sit down, and let me hear something about you."

"I have come, sir," he replied, "from a far-off place, Australia, where I am now settled in comfort; although, since I saw you last, many are the difficulties I have gone through, and some of them almost too much for me. But I am glad, sir, to find you, as many other old friends, alive and well,—some, indeed, are gone; but go we must all of us, one time or other, and it is not surprising that many of those who were with us nigh twenty years ago are now dead. 'Tis a painful thing, sir, as well as pleasurable, to visit the home of one's childhood after many years absence!"

"Yes, John," I replied, "there is much in such visits to remind one of the uncertainty of all earthly things; for we see many changes in things around. All your family are alive, I hope. Let me see; when you left you had three children, I think?"

"Yes, sir; I am thankful to say, as yet, death has not approached our home, although I feel we must always be prepared for him. My wife and the three boys are alive and well, at least, they were when I left them; and the others too."

"You have not brought them with you, then?" I said.

"No, sir; it is too long and expensive a journey to take one's family at one's back."

"And how many children have you now?" I asked.

"Eight, sir; five boys and three girls. The

boys, indeed, are grown up into young men, and fine stout young fellows they are, able to handle a hatchet or a spade with any one in the colony."

"Your poor old father grows very infirm," I observed; "and, from all appearance, is not likely to remain long among us."

"I fear not," he said; "indeed, it was a wish to see him before he dies, that made me come to England at the present time. The old man wrote to say he was very weak, and expressed a great desire to see me, and so I felt it my duty, in spite of the long voyage, to come over."

"You did right, John," I replied; "happy would it be if all children would put themselves to inconvenience for the purpose of pleasing their parents. Alas! there is too little filial duty, or filial love, in the young around us. But be sure of this, that no man must expect any happiness from his own children, if he neglects to honour his own father and mother according to the commandment. Your father, I hope, has recovered his late attack?"

"Yes, sir, he is now much better, he says; and hopes in a day or two to get out of doors again."

"I am very glad to hear it; and now, before you go, I should like to learn some few of the events that have occurred to you since the day you left us."

"Eh, sir, you may well say you would like to hear a *few*, for if I was to tell you all that has happened to us since that morning when we came up to say good-bye to your poor father and mother that are gone, and all the rest of you, I should fill a book as big as that great heavy looking thing

up there (pointing to a large folio volume on the book-shelf). But you'll like to hear something ; and if I don't tell my tale plainly, I hope you will stop to ask any questions you wish to know ; I am but a bad scholar still, although what learning I have I am indebted for to the Church-school in the village ;—you remember, sir, how dull I always was, and what trouble poor old Mr. Smith took with me."

" Nay, John," I said, " not so very dull ; you were perhaps a long time in learning your lessons, but you were diligent and persevering, and did not easily forget what you once had learned. When you left school, I remember you were a very good reader and writer, and had a fair knowledge of arithmetic ; and have you not found even this of great use to you ?"

" Yes, sir ; I do not know what I should have done without it. But to my story. We had a quick voyage out, that is, quick for the length of the way, and according to the usual time taken up, but we thought it very slow ; for although for some few weeks we found plenty to do in looking about us at the tackling of the ship, and admiring the sea, which certainly was, to my mind, one of the most wonderful things in the world ; yet, after some time, we grew accustomed to these things, and as the party in the ship with us were not very pleasant people, we found it dull work. At length, however, the voyage was over, and, much to our joy, we placed our feet once again on solid earth."

" And where did you land, John ?"

" At Sydney, sir," he replied, " which was, even then, a large and flourishing town, although it has

increased very much since that time. Well, as soon as we were out of the vessel, we looked about for a house, and, after some difficulty, found one that suited our purpose; and putting into it our bits of furniture and the tools we brought with us, I turned my thoughts to getting some land whereon to settle. For this purpose I went out one morning to make inquiries on the subject, and from all I heard in England before we left, thought there would be no difficulty in supplying our wants. But when I came to inquire, it was a far less easy matter than I had imagined. People here, when they talk of the colonies, speak as though a man had nothing to do but to pay his passage out, or get Government to pay it for him, and then, as soon as he is landed, to go at once and take possession of a property where he may make his fortune and live like a gentleman. The case, however, is very different, as I soon learnt after my arrival. ‘Pray, sir,’ I said, addressing a man whom I met at a little distance from our lodging, ‘can you tell me where I am likely to get a little bit of land on which I may make a livelihood for myself and a young family I have just brought out from England?’

“The man laughed, and told me, if I would walk up beyond the Blue Mountains, as we call them, I should find plenty of land, but I was not likely to bring up a family upon it, unless I could use a saw well, and they could live upon sawdust and leaves. His answer did not afford me much comfort, but I thought it best not to be angry, so I thanked him for what he had said, told him my circumstances, and asked his advice

as to what I had better do. ‘ You are come out,’ he said, ‘ you tell me, with a bit of money, that is, a few pounds, with a good chest of tools, plenty of clothes, a wife, three children, a strong arm, a stout heart, and a humble dependence upon Almighty God, that he will not suffer you to sink through as long as you are faithful to Him, and to the best of your power labour to do your duty. All these, in their respective ways, are very good things, especially the last, for without it no man has a right to expect success in any undertaking whatever. But you must be careful in what you do, or you will expend your money, blunt your tools, and wear out your strength and energies in an unsuccessful task. Your money is not sufficient to enable you to purchase at once sufficient land to support a family upon ; for before it became available for farming purposes, you would have to clear it, which, let me tell you, is no easy matter, and in doing which you would have to hire labourers, for you could not effect it yourself. You must not think, therefore, of setting up as a landowner at once. Take a wiser course : make inquiries in Sydney for some man who has property up the country, who wants labour, and make the best agreement you can with him ; he will give you good wages, build you a bit of a house for your family, and allow you a certain portion of his wood-land, which you may clear in your leisure hours, and by degrees bring it into cultivation. Place your money in good security ; you won’t need it at present ; and when you do want it you will have it, and find it very useful in stocking your bit of land with a few sheep or a

cow, or, indeed, for purchasing anything you may require. You appear, sir,' the stranger continued, 'to have come out to this country with very imperfect ideas of the nature of it, or of what will be required in order to your success. Such is the case with very many Englishmen; they find they are in difficulties at home; this begets dissatisfaction in their minds, and they turn themselves, without proper consideration, to the first thing that turns up, which appears to them as likely to remove the immediate pressure from their shoulders. John Bull, on the whole, is a sensible fellow, but of late years a large class have sprung up in the mother country who are no better than calves; they run blindfolded after every cow that appears likely to give them milk, and when they have reached her they find her dry. This has been the case in religion, in politics, and in everything else; a new scheme has engaged thousands as its followers, and when they have awakened from their dream,—for such things generally are but dreams,—they have discovered themselves to be a long way off from the old beaten paths in which they might have walked safely, and been far more ahead, as the Americans say, than they are, by following their new-fangled untrodden roads.

“ ‘ No offence to you, sir, but if you had reflected a good deal on the step you were about to take, and collected all the information upon the subject you could, I fancy you would not have come out to this new land with your present impressions. But I wish not to discourage you; if you are steady and industrious, and above all,

if you look up to God to bless your exertions, I do not doubt but that you may obtain a respectable livelihood for yourself and family; and in time may, probably, rise to be a person of some substance in the colony.'

"With these words the stranger left me, and I returned home, to devise some means by which I might put into effect his seasonable advice."



CHAPTER II.

" SOME few days after the above conversation, I became acquainted with a colonist, who seemed to be the kind of person I was in quest of. His farm was situated at some distance from Sydney, in the county of Camden. The district in which he lived was called, he said, Illawarra, or the Five Islands ; it was very mountainous, with plenty of water, the want of which is often severely felt in Australia. The country he described as very fertile, and very beautiful, and in other respects the situation appeared to hold out so many advantages, that I consented to his terms, and agreed to enter his service, as a general overseer of his estate, but still engaged to work with the axe and the spade when not otherwise employed.

" A few days saw our small collection of furniture, clothes, tools, &c. packed up ; and, after rather a toilsome journey, we arrived at the place of our destination. Our master had preceded us, and made as much preparation for our arrival as possible ; he had built for us a small wooden house, which, although at first sight somewhat cold and uncomfortable in appearance, we had great reason to be thankful for, and eventually found as warm and agreeable as one of stone or brick.

" The situation of our residence was one of the most beautiful that can be conceived. It was a

spot of level ground, about half-way up a gentle hill that rose out of the river Shoal Haven, which flowed in full sight at our feet. At the back, and on either side, were beautiful trees, which formed an almost impervious screen from without ; and in front, down to the river's brink, there was a slope of grass completely clear of every vestige of wood or bush, which, from the smooth appearance of the turf, did not seem ever to have trespassed upon it.

" Our house, as I said, was built of wood, and was formed by large staves, or rather trunks of trees, let into the ground, with wooden planks nailed horizontally upon them ; the roof was also of planks, or rather of split trees, for it was put together very roughly, and the wood had not been touched with the plane. Over our heads, far above the roof of our hut, were the huge leaves of the palm and other trees, some of these trees being as high as eighty or ninety feet, forming a complete canopy, and giving us the idea of a safe protection from the wet, without the intervention of the roof raised beneath them. Under these, there were enormous ferns spreading out their leaves in all directions ; and on all sides of us were beautiful shrubs and wild plants, giving to the earth the appearance of a large carpet, dressed out with various colours.

" At first, of course, we found many inconveniences in our new situation, and daily discovered the absence of those innumerable little comforts which are in a manner necessary to those who have lived in a civilized country, but which, when in England, we made no account of. The want

of coals we felt very severely ; for, although the wood around us in the forest supplied us with fuel, we discovered that it was without many of the properties that belong to coal, and which render the latter so much more useful for all domestic purposes. Again, we had no shops to fly to, when we wanted our little bits of salt or pepper, but were obliged to wait until some one went to the next town, from which we were distant many miles. But, above all, we suffered most from the want of a church. We had no church, and no clergyman within forty miles, which rendered it impossible for us to attend divine worship beyond a few times in the year.

" People in England think little, I fear, of the blessings of having the Church among them ; they see the old venerable building standing in the midst of the village, and hear the sweet bells chiming away so merrily, Sunday after Sunday ; and they can see and hear this almost without emotion ; they know they are there, and they are so accustomed to them, that they learn to lose all regard towards them. Their clergyman, too—they see him walking amongst them day by day ; they know that, by sending for him, when sick or distressed, a few minutes will bring him to their bedside, and, because they know this, they cease to value his services. But if they were placed, as we were, in the midst of a wild wilderness, where week followed week, during which we never saw either church or clergyman, and had nothing to remind us of the blessed Sabbath, but the change of our own dress, our freedom from toil, and the service, in which we all joined, in the largest room

of the hut, which on these occasions served as our church ;—let them be situated thus for a few months, and I feel sure that they would think and speak very differently from what they do now on the blessings and privilege of having the means of grace so constantly within their reach. It is very true, sir, we may read the word of God at home, and think of the Saviour who died for the sins of mankind ; and we may pray for God's Spirit to make us holy, and fit us for heaven ; but, though we tried to keep up the remembrance of Christ without the ministrations of our Church, or the sacraments, we found our services often very dull and unprofitable. We then felt the full force of the command of the Apostle, not to forget the assembling of ourselves together, and the great blessing of the sacraments."

"It is indeed very sad," I said, "to observe how very negligent too many people in this country are in their use of the ministrations of the Church. From their ordinary conduct, one cannot but fear that they care but little for them. Week follows week, with many of them, and the house of God is neglected ; they never go near it, and many, I believe, in some parts of the country are never within the sacred walls of a church from the time they are baptized to the time they are buried. If I remember right," I continued, "you were rather negligent, John, in this respect, before you went abroad?"

"I fear I was," he answered, "and often I have thought in distant lands, when sitting by the hour, and longing for one of the humblest of our parish churches in England, that I was denied

the privilege of public worship out there as a judgment upon me for having neglected it here, where I had so many opportunities before me. Very frequently, indeed, on such occasions, have I called to mind the forty-second Psalm, and said with David, ‘ As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God ? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me : for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.’”

“ It is well,” I replied, “ that your thoughts and affections took the turn they did ; for with many, I fear, long neglect of the ordinances of religion renders them indifferent and callous, and so they go on, growing colder and colder to holy things till they die. Alas ! what an awful consideration it is, that thousands die yearly in this state, upon whom the day of judgment must come with frightful consequences ! But did you make no attempt,” I asked, “ to procure the services of a Missionary for yourself, and the other families that were scattered in the district in which you lived ? for, I suppose, you had some neighbours, although, perhaps, they did not reside very near to you.”

“ Yes,” he replied, “ I made several attempts, as also did others, to get a clergyman among us ; but we were told that the Missionary Societies in

England were so badly supported, and the demands upon them so great, that we must not expect any assistance from that quarter."

"Why, then," I asked, "did you not apply to Government? perhaps they would have assisted you in your need."

"No," he replied, "there was no aid from Government. We sent a very strong remonstrance, as did some other parties from different parts of the colony, but all to no effect. Indeed, you will not be surprised at this, when I tell you, that, in 1821, when Colonel Macquarie gave up the government of the colony, there were only seven clergymen among a population of nearly thirty thousand souls! How, then, could we expect to be supplied where on all sides there was so sad a dearth?"

"And how did you manage," I asked, "if you wanted to have a child christened, or if any of you felt desirous to partake of the holy communion?"

"We were obliged to go to Sydney," he replied, "a distance of between forty and fifty miles; a long way, to be sure, but there was no church nearer; and I am happy to say that we did go, and that our children were all duly baptized, and that, three or four times a-year, all of the district who were disposed went to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."

"Of course you read the Church Service over to your family every Sunday?" I said.

"Yes," he replied, "and, by the advice of the clergyman at Sydney, all of us that were within reach met together at a certain place, where was the largest room in the district, and then the

oldest man, who happened to be the best reader, read aloud the greater part of the service, as it is written in the Prayer-book, the rest of us taking up the responses. Some among us were pretty good singers, and so we sang some of the Psalms. It was indeed a happy day for us, although we sadly missed the solemnity that belongs to a place of regular public worship, and felt the want of a properly ordained Minister ; yet, as it was all we could have, we made the best of it, and, as I said, felt very grateful for such an opportunity of meeting together and worshipping God. On these occasions also some one among us read a homily or a sermon ; for in our little stock of books we had several good books of that kind, such as the Book of Homilies, Bishop Wilson's Sermons, Bishop Horne on the Psalms, some Sermons of Bishop Jeremy Taylor, with other pious works, such as the Whole Duty of Man, Bishop Ken's Divine Love, Nelson on the Fasts and Festivals, &c. When, therefore, we met together in this way,—for at first going there was no such thing,—it was very pleasant, and, I hope, profitable for all of us."

At this period my visitor, pleading an engagement, said that he must take his leave, but if I would allow him to do so, would call on the following morning.

I felt so interested in his account of colonial life, that I very gladly consented to this arrangement ; and, requesting him to come early, for the time bade him farewell.

CHAPTER III.

At the appointed hour on the following morning John made his appearance, and continued his narrative.

" I spoke yesterday of the difficulty we had, or rather I should say the impossibility, of attending public worship in church, and told you, sir, how severely we felt the privation.

" We had somewhat similar difficulties, for a long time, in obtaining a good education for our children. The alphabet, indeed, and spelling, with some other few things, their mother and myself managed to teach them ; but our instruction was very different from that we had received in our younger days. At night, which was the only time that either my wife or self could devote to this purpose, we were generally very tired with the day's work, and went through our task in a very imperfect manner. The children, too, were for the most very weary, and much more fit for bed and sleep, than for spelling or reading. Oh, how often did we wish for old Mr. Smith out there, with his calm patient way, by which he always managed to make his boys do more than anybody else could with tenfold his severity. And then, on the Wednesdays and Fridays, how often we thought of you, sir, and the privileges the children enjoyed here from your instruction and catechizing, by which, I can safely say, without

intending any offence, that I learnt more of the truths of our holy religion than by all the sermons I ever heard.

"These privations we felt very deeply, but we could not help it, and so made the best of what we had, praying God, in his good time, to supply our wants."

"And what was your principal occupation?" I asked, as he paused in his narrative.

"Oh, sir," he replied, "I had many things to do. I had, for one matter, to look after the convict labourers whom my master employed, and whose work it was my business to superintend. Then I had to attend to the sheep, which animals abound in the district in which I was; and, indeed, the care of them occupies a very great portion of our time. Then I had to see to the clearing away of the wood in some parts of the forest, which my master was anxious to bring into cultivation. I had plenty to do, sir, I can assure you, and never returned home at night without being pretty well tired with my day's work. Besides this, I had my own bit of land to clear."

"Your own bit of land," I said. "How came you by any land of your own?"

"That was part of our agreement," said John. "I was to have a small portion for myself, to clear in leisure hours, and so commence a little property of my own. Such is a very common custom among the colonists, as I had learnt from the stranger I met at Sydney. Money is scarce; and so many of those who possess more land than they are able to cultivate, gladly pay for labour with that, rather than with coin."

" Money," I said, " is probably often disused in some of the remote places, where barter is carried on by the exchange of one commodity for another?"

" Yes, sir," replied John, " and I regret to say that many of the labourers are paid for their work in spirits, which, of course, is not only useless to them, but encourages a habit of drinking, which very generally increases till they are ruined."

" Is there much drunkenness, then," I asked, " in the colony ?"

" A great deal," replied John, " although I believe it was much worse a few years ago than it is at present ; but it was scarcely to be expected that it should have been otherwise. The upper people set the example, which was readily followed by those below them, many of whom were emancipated convicts, and men of dissolute habits ; and there was no one to tell them it was wrong ; for, as I said, there was scarcely any clergymen in the colony, and the laity were generally careless, even if they were not partakers in their sins. But, unhappily, drunkenness was not the only crime that arose from this bad practice : one sin almost always begets another, and so it turned out there ; for when a man had become accustomed to drink, he went on to something else ; and, among other sins which has infected the colony, to her great harm, is a habit of gambling, which, at different times, has prevailed to a dreadful extent."

" Do you mean, that it has prevailed among the labouring class," I asked, " or only among those that are wealthy ?"

"Among all, sir," replied John; "the very lowest and the poorest of the population will sit down sometimes for hours together, and, instead of attending to their work, will play games of hazard for liquor, and, perhaps, conclude their meeting either with a fight or a drunken bout."

"Oh, sir, when I have seen these poor ignorant creatures doing such things, I have felt very deeply for them, and wondered how the folks in England could spend so much upon themselves, when a few hundred pounds would have gone a great way in making these men better."

"As to making them better, John, I fear we must not speak too positively upon that; but, at all events, if the Church was able to do her duty, she would lift her voice in those distant lands, telling the people what was right; as well as affording the means of grace to those prepared to receive them. In order to enable her to do this, it is certainly the duty of all persons in England, both rich and poor, to give towards the propagation of the Gospel more than they do."

"Indeed it is," replied John, "and I can scarcely tell you, sir, how greatly I have been struck with the indifference of Englishmen on this point since my return. 'Oh,' say some of them to whom I have spoken on the subject, 'no doubt missionaries are wanted abroad, but they are wanted at home, and we must attend to our own first.'"

"There is certainly something in that," I said, "for, in the manufacturing districts especially, the population is as ignorant and demoralized as the people in Australia can be; and there appears to be quite as great a want of clergy among our own

people there, as can be the case among yours abroad.

"No doubt, sir, it is perfectly true that there is a great spiritual dearth in this country, and especially in the manufacturing districts, where there is too much reason to fear that souls are perishing for lack of food; and no doubt it is the duty of every Englishman to do all in his power to remedy so dreadful a state of things, which sooner or later must bring a judgment upon our nation; but it has happened, when I have made inquiries of these gentlemen who refuse to assist our missions on the score of our wants at home, that they are just the persons who give least to remedy the state of things they deplore. Now, it is my humble opinion, that no one ought to consider himself justified in refusing a call upon him to send the Gospel abroad, who cannot conscientiously say that he has done all in his power to propagate it at home. It is a very easy thing to find excuses for not doing what we ought to do; and I am afraid that all of us are apt to practise this to a very great extent with regard to our alms-giving. One man says one thing, and another says another thing, each finding reasons satisfactory to himself for refusing the call made upon him, till, among them all, a very little is done, and our charitable institutions are most lamentably neglected. You know better than I can, sir, but I have always perceived that when men love their God, and feel that they are God's children for the sake of Jesus Christ, they have a penny at least for every good purpose, which they contrive to save from their unnecessary expenses,

and surely no wish will be stronger, in a thankful heart, than the sending out missionaries to our own countrymen who have left their native place to find a subsistence in a foreign land. It seems to me to be the principle of almsgiving laid down in the New Testament, that they that love Christ should love their brethren also."

"What you say is quite right," I replied, "but still I am happy to think that, of late years, matters in this respect have mended a good deal among us. The people generally are much better acquainted with the nature and duties of almsgiving than they were when you were among us, and indeed they practise it more."

"I believe they do," he replied, "and I am glad to find, sir, that you encourage the donations even of the poorest, by the district associations for different societies you have established in the parish. It was only last night, after I left you, that I was asked by one of your young people, who it seems is Secretary to the Branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, for something towards it, this Society having, as he said, peculiar claims upon me; I asked him how small a sum he would accept, and he answered, 'Anything you please, I sometimes receive pence and halfpence from those that cannot give more.' It is indeed quite right, sir, that the poor should have the privilege of contributing to missions, and other charitable institutions, as well as the rich; and when I think of what our blessed Lord said of the poor widow's mite, I feel surprise that this point should have been neglected among us as much as it has been."

"Well, John," I said, "we will not speak harshly of former neglect; we may console ourselves that we are awakening to a proper sense of such things as those you have mentioned, and others needless to talk of now; and let us pray God, that since we are now learning what is right, we may have grace to fulfil the same; so that we be not like the servant who, when he knew his Lord's will, did it not, and in consequence was beaten with many stripes. But, to proceed with your narrative. Did you ever come in contact with the natives?"

"Frequently," said John; "and I will tell you a few things about them."



CHAPTER IV.

"THE first time I came across them was in rather a singular manner. I had been employed for some days, with other fellow-labourers, in clearing away a portion of my master's property that lay in a very retired and distant spot, but close to the sea-shore. We had made a small temporary residence, and instead of returning home at night, which indeed it would not have been possible for us to do, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in our wood hut, and only saw our families once a week, namely, on the Sunday.

"For several weeks we had been at this work, and at length had cleared of wood a large space of ground, which appeared to be of a very good nature, and likely to prove fruitful. The spot we had cleared was free from trees down to the sea-shore ; and one evening, a little before sun-set, as we were thinking of retiring for the day, we observed, out at sea, a large floating body, which at first looked like a boat turned upside down ; and we had many conjectures as to the probable fate of the poor fellows who had been in it. There were some of us, however, who did not think that it was a boat. It appeared to be of a different shape, and altogether it looked more like the trunk of some enormous tree, although we all said we had

never seen the trunk of a tree as large, nor, indeed, would it have stood as far out of the water as this huge object did.

" Well, the evening wore away, and although the great black thing came nearer to the shore, yet we could make nothing out of it, and went to rest, wondering much what it could possibly be.

" We had been in bed, perhaps, three or four hours, when we were awoke by some of the most horrible noises you can possibly conceive; and as they proceeded from the direction where we had last seen the black object on the evening before, we could not avoid the conviction that, in some way or other, it had to do with the unearthly sounds we heard. Various were our conjectures upon it; and one of our party, more fearful and weak than the rest, declared that what we had seen was some monster of the deep, who was coming towards the shore for some dreadful purpose, and that our best plan would be immedately to decamp. This counsel, of course, others of us rejected, and laughed at the idea our companion entertained, but still we were equally at a loss to account for what we heard. At length it was agreed, that as it was a bright moon-light night, we should all proceed as carefully as possible towards the place, and endeavour to ascertain the cause of this mystery. This in effect we did; and after a somewhat tedious walk, taking the most intricate and wooded paths, and all the time hearing the remonstrances of our timid companion, who considered that he was rushing on his fate, we arrived at a spot where we could see what was going on.

"The shore was literally crowded with human beings; where they came from we could not tell, for we had seen no one during the time we had been at work in the neighbourhood; but there they were, thousands of them, and our only conjecture was that they must be natives of the country; for what purpose they were thus collected together we were unable to imagine. We watched them for some time in silence, when, all on a sudden, we observed several blazing fires along the coast, which appeared to us to be beacons, and made us fear that they were intended to call down the natives from the neighbouring hills, for the purpose of an attack upon some party, perhaps upon ourselves. That our conjectures were founded in truth we were still more convinced, when we saw the signal fires were answered as we suspected, and that many others joined the thousands already assembled, and entered with them into the same dancings and noises which we had seen and heard.

"All this went on for some time, and we were becoming more reconciled to the sight before us, as we observed no hostile preparations made by the party, when daylight appeared, and by degrees, as we ventured nearer to the place of meeting, we learned the cause of this concourse.

"The large black object we had seen out at sea on the evening before was the carcase of a dead whale, which was brought to the shore by the tide, and had been observed at a great distance by some of the natives upon the neighbouring hills.

"This kind of food, we learned, is considered a great dainty by the inhabitants, who, on such an occasion as the present, are in the habit of in-

viting all their friends to the feast, which is ushered in by noises and dancings such as we had witnessed. Beacon fires are lighted, and all within sight consider this a sufficient invitation, and hasten to the spoil.

" We were watching their proceedings, when some of our party, in an over-anxiety to see what was going on, proceeded beyond the shelter of the wood, and were almost instantly recognised by the savages, for such is the name we commonly give to them, although in many respects, perhaps, not the most courteous nor appropriate. As soon as they saw us they advanced at once, singing and dancing in a most extraordinary manner, and showing, by all means in their power, that their intentions towards us were peaceful, and that they were anxious we should join the feast. Such an invitation, you may readily suppose, was not the most tempting in the world; but we were afraid of offending them, and anxious, moreover, to see what a New South Wales banquet was; pocketing, therefore, our scruples, we accompanied them to the spot. As soon as we arrived the men and women came round us, brandishing their knives and sharp pointed sticks, and attempting to show, by all means in their power, the pleasure they felt in this accession of guests. Not so ourselves; for as I looked from one face to the other of my companions, in spite of all attempts at concealment, I could see written very visibly feelings of disgust at what they witnessed, and I believe, at the time, we all wished ourselves in any spot in the whole of New Holland rather than the one in which we were.

"At length our worst fears were realized, and it became but too evident that we must either eat some of the horrible beast before us, or offend our hosts, which might have been attended with far more serious consequences than the other was likely to produce. We therefore took to our heels, and ran off as hard as we could. Fortunately for us, the savages were too intent on their feast to take notice of our flight.

"After our escape, as you may readily suppose, we remained at a respectful distance from the savages, and, for the rest of the day, kept our axes and spades silent, lest by the noise made in using them we might tempt them to another visit. Our hope was, that during the day, after they had eaten as much of the whale as they could, they would carry off the remainder of the carcase to their distant homes: such, however, did not prove to be the case, for two whole days they remained feasting on the same spot, the number of people apparently continually increasing, till towards the evening of the second day, when there appeared to be little else but bones left, a regular fight commenced, which, after a conflict of several hours, ended, as such scenes generally do, by the death and maiming for life of several of the combatants. And as we lay in our hut many thoughts occurred to our minds; and first, that of thankfulness that we had escaped from a scene where there had been some danger; for had the savages been irritated by our conduct, we might have been among the number of their victims; or had there been any previous cause of dispute between the natives and the settlers, it is not improbable that they might have

taken that opportunity of avenging themselves. We felt therefore thankful for our safety; but a strong feeling pervaded our minds, both of the responsibility of England, and of our own duty as occupiers of the land. In the dispensations of Providence the land of the inhabitants of Australia is under the government of England; but surely we have no right to dispossess them without endeavouring to communicate to them the blessings of the covenant of grace. If the command of our Lord to his Apostles, to go and preach the Gospel to every creature, is binding on us generally, and the Indian, and African, and North American ought to partake of our fulness, the inhabitants of Australia seem to have even a stronger claim."

"Well, John," I said, as soon as he had finished this account, "you certainly give a very deplorable account of the nature of an Australian banquet; and I fear your reflections are too just; for, although differing in detail, they are not altogether unlike some of the feasts that occur in our own more civilized land. Alas! how many times does it happen in this country, that men meet together on some festive occasion, and after eating to gluttony, and drinking to drunkenness, end their feast by quarrelling and fighting! It is certainly very disgusting to hear of such things among savages, but how much more disgusting when they occur among Christians, who enjoy privileges which the persons you describe know nothing of. I am very much afraid that the people in this land do not carefully weigh the immense responsibility there is

in a high state of civilization, and more especially in having the Gospel of Christ among them. They read of such scenes as that you have described, and think it sufficient that they do not act in a similar manner ; forgetting, that as far as the real point of the matter is concerned, they are quite as culpable in gormandizing over their beef and ale, as the New Hollanders are over their whale. With our superior knowledge, and possessing, as we do, the means of grace, we of course ought to practise a correspondent tone of godliness, and avoid, in all its forms, those carnal lusts, which are so commonly indulged in, even among Christians, in a refined way."

" Yes," replied John, " what you say, sir, is perfectly true ; the people in England, in reality, practise the same crimes as do the savages in New Holland, although they do not perceive the enormity and grossness of them, because they come before them in a more specious garb. But really, among all the scenes of wickedness and beastly brutality I have witnessed abroad, I don't think I ever saw more disgusting scenes than may occasionally be witnessed at the gin-shops in London, and in some other of our large towns, especially in the manufacturing districts, some of which I have already seen since my arrival in this country. In these dens of iniquity, for I can call them by no milder term, I have seen such sights as I believe a savage would be ashamed to partake of."

" It appears to me," I replied, " that the best counteraction to such practices, is to multiply clergy, churches, and schools, throughout the land ;

let us teach the people, from their earliest years, what is right, and we may hope they will avoid what is wrong. You remember the words of the wise king, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ (Prov. xxii. 6.) Depend upon it,” I continued, “unless we profit now by our past misconduct, and the fearful consequences that have already befallen us from former neglect, this country’s fate is sealed. It is impossible, so to speak, that a land can stand in peace and prosperity, whose children are children of the devil, which, alas, is already but too much the case in many portions of the country ! Let the wealthy furnish the Church with means, let the Church make use of the power entrusted to her, and let the people avail themselves of the advantages offered them, and we may yet see England’s population brought back to the sound Christian principles and practices which, unhappily, they have but too much deserted.”



CHAPTER V.

THE foregoing incidents of the whale feast interested me so much, that I inquired of John whether he was at all acquainted with the means adopted by the natives for procuring other kind of food for subsistence, as I remarked, whales could not be very common articles of consumption among them.

"Indeed they are not," said John; "a whale feast is an event of no ordinary kind in the life of an inhabitant of the bush; and if we would know how the common sustenance of life is procured by him, we must follow him through a variety of scenes and pursuits, of which by no means the least important or interesting, is the chase of the kangaroo."

* "This singular and harmless creature is now so well known to Europeans, from specimens that have been brought over and placed in our public collections of animals, and also from numberless pictures, that it would be waste of time to stop to describe it. In truth, being one of the productions peculiar to Australia, it may be said, from the figures of it to be seen upon the back of every book relating to that country, to have become almost the *kobong* or crest of that southern region. In many portions of New Holland, par-

* From a work on Australia, by the Rev. W. Pridden.

ticularly where the country is wooded, and the soil tolerably fertile, kangaroos are very abundant; but so great havoc is made among these defenceless creatures by their various enemies, especially by man, that their numbers appear to be upon the decrease.

"A day's hunting is often the cause of no small excitement, even in England, among men who care nothing for the object of their chase, and are certain of a good dinner at the end of their day's sport; but we may suppose this to be a matter of more serious interest to the Australian, who depends upon his skill and patience in hunting for his daily food. His whole manner and appearance, accordingly, are changed on those occasions, his eyes brighten up, his motion becomes quick, though silent, and every token of his eagerness and anxiety is discoverable in his behaviour. Earth, water, trees, sky, are all in turn the subjects of his keenest search, and his whole soul appears to be engaged in his two senses of sight and hearing. His wives, and even his children, become perfectly silent, until, perhaps, a suppressed whistle is given by one of the women, denoting that she sees a kangaroo near her husband, after which all is again quiet, and an unpractised stranger might ride on within a few yards of the group, and not perceive a living thing. The devoted animal meanwhile, after listening two or three times without being able to perceive any further cause of alarm, returns to its food or other occupation in complete security, while the watchful savage poises his spear, and lifts up his arm ready for throwing it, and then advances

slowly and with stealth towards his prey, no part moving but his legs. Whenever the kangaroo looks round, its enemy stands still in the same position he is in when it first raises its head, until the animal, again assured of safety, gives a skip or two and goes on feeding : again the native advances, and the same scene occurs, until the whizzing spear penetrates the unfortunate creature, upon which the whole wood rings with sudden shouts ; women and children all join in the chase, and at last the kangaroo, weakened with loss of blood, and encumbered by the spear, places its back against a tree, and appears to attack its pursuer with the fury of despair. Though naturally a timid animal, it will, when it is hard pressed for life, make a bold stand ; and if hunted by Europeans, will sometimes wait for the dogs, and tear them with its hind claws, or squeeze them with its fore arms, till the blood gushes out of the hound's nostrils ; and sometimes the poor creature will take to water, and drown every dog that comes near to it. But by the natives the poor beast is generally soon dispatched with spears thrown from a distance, and its body is carried off by its conqueror and his wives to some convenient resting-place, where they may enjoy their meal. There is likewise another mode of hunting the same animal, in which many persons join together, and which, though more lively and noisy, is not so characteristic as the first. A herd of kangaroos are surprised, either in a thick bushy place, to which they have retired during the heat of the day, or else in an open plain. In the first case, they are encircled by a party, each native giving

a low whistle as he takes up his place ; and when the blockade is finished, the bushes are set on fire, and the frightened animals fly from the flames towards the open plains ; but no sooner do they approach the outskirts of the wood, than the bushes are fired in the direction in which they are running, while they are driven back by loud calls and tremendous cries, which increase their terror, and they run wildly about, until at length, maddened by fear, they make a rush through their enemies, who allow but a few of them to escape. When the kangaroos are surrounded upon a plain, the point generally chosen is an open bottom encircled by wood ; each native has his place given him by some of the elder ones, and all possible means that art or experience, or the nature of the ground, can furnish, are employed to ensure success in approaching as nearly as may be towards the animals without disturbing them. Thus the circle narrows round the unwary herd, till at last, one of them becomes alarmed and bounds away, but its flight is speedily stopped by a savage with fearful yells ; and, before the first moments of terror and surprise have passed by, the armed natives come running upon them from every side, brandishing their spears and raising loud cries ; nor does the slaughter thus commenced commonly finish before the greater number of them are fallen. These public hunts are conducted under certain rules ; for example, the supposed owner of the land must be present, and must have invited the party, or a deadly fight between human beings is pretty sure to take place. The first spear that strikes a kan-

garoo settles whose property the dead animal is to be, however slight the wound, and even though inflicted by a boy only, this rule holds good ; and if the creature killed is one which the boy may not yet lawfully eat, then his right passes on to his father, or nearest male relative. The cries of the hunters are said to be very beautiful and expressive, and they vary at different periods of the chase, being readily understood and answered by all, so that they can thus explain their meaning to one another at a very great distance.

"But since the kangaroo is one of the principal articles of food in the wilds of New Holland, there are yet other modes of taking it, which are commonly practised.

"Sometimes they use the ordinary methods of catching it in nets and pitfalls. Occasionally also, in a dry district, where many animals assemble together from a great distance to drink at some solitary piece of water, the huntsman builds for himself a rude place of shelter, in which for hours he remains concealed and motionless, until the thirsty animals approach in sufficient numbers. Thus kangaroos, cockatoos, pigeons, &c., are attacked and destroyed without mercy, and the patience of the hunter is commonly richly rewarded by the booty he obtains. But the mode of tracking a kangaroo until it is wearied out, is the one which, beyond all others, commands the admiration of the Australians ; for it calls forth the exercise of every quality most highly prized among savages, skill in following traces, endurance of hunger and thirst, unwearyed bodily exertion, and lasting perseverance. To perform this task the

hunter starts upon the track of the kangaroo, which he follows until he catches sight of the animal, as it flies timidly before him ; again he pursues the track, and again the object of his pursuit bounds away from him ; and this is repeated until nightfall, when the pursuer lights his fire and sleeps upon the track. With the first light of day the hunt is renewed ; and towards the close of the second day, or in the course of the third, the kangaroo, wearied and exhausted by the chase, will allow the hunter to approach near enough to spear it. None but a skilful hunter, in the pride of youth and strength, can perform this feat ; and one who has frequently practised it, always enjoys great fame amongst his companions.

"When the kangaroo has been obtained in some one or other of these various methods, the first operation is to take off the skin of the tail, the sinews of which are carefully preserved to sew cloaks or bags, or to make spears. The next thing to be thought of is the cooking of the flesh ; and two modes of doing this are common. One of these is to make an oven by digging a hole in the sand and lighting a fire in it ; when the sand is well heated, and a large heap of ashes is collected, the hole is scraped out, and the kangaroo is placed in it, skin and all ; it is then covered over with ashes, and a slow fire is kept up above it ; when baked enough, it is taken out and laid upon its back ; the intestines are then removed, and the whole of the gravy is left in the body of the animal, which is carefully taken out of the skin, and then cut up and eaten. Travellers in the bush speak very highly of the delicious flavour of the

meat thus curiously cooked. The other mode of dressing is merely to broil different portions of the kangaroo upon the fire; and it may be noticed that certain parts, as the blood, the entrails, and the marrow, are reckoned great dainties. Of these the young men are forbidden to partake. Of the blood a sort of long sausage is made, and this is afterwards eaten by the person of most consequence in the company."



CHAPTER VI.

"I COULD tell you many more of their customs," said John, as he concluded the foregoing interesting account, "but at present should weary you, if I did so; for, like most travellers, when I begin to tell of what I have seen, I do not know when to leave off. However, on some future occasion, sir, if you wish to hear more, I shall be very glad to continue the same subject."

"Nevertheless," I said, "you must not leave me in this abrupt manner, as I saw him rising to depart, you must give me a few minutes more to tell in brief the history of your personal life in the land wherein you dwell. And first let me hear something of your wife; how did she bear the change, and how does she get on?"

"Oh, Susan gets on well enough now, sir," he replied, "although at first she certainly did make some sore complaints, and over and over again wished herself back in England. The thing which grieved her most was, I believe, the loss she felt in there being no Church, or clergyman; it was like living among heathens, she said. This preyed upon her mind a good deal. You know she was always a religious-minded woman, and she used to think that Almighty God's blessing could never rest upon us while we were hindered from attending a place of worship."

"These fears, however delightful to hear of in such days as the present, when men think little or nothing of the blessings of public worship, or the dangers of neglecting it, you ought to have endeavoured to remove," I said; "for surely there could be no sin in your not doing that which it was impossible for you to do. How far you were wrong in fixing your habitation in a place where you could not attend public worship is another question; but, as far as relates to your not going when there was no means of your going, this, of course, could not be wrong. We are required to do the best we can in the position in which we are placed, but are not punished because we do not those things which we cannot do."

"Very true, sir," he replied, "and so I used to talk to Susan; and indeed my words, I doubt not, had their effect; but for all this she was very miserable for a long time, and constantly said that we had no business to go out to a place where we were denied the christian privileges we had enjoyed before."

"No doubt," I said, "there was something in that."

"Yes, sir, and so I felt it; and, indeed, if I was going out as a settler now, one of the first things I should strive after, would be to find a situation where I might enjoy the blessings of the Church, such as all people may have in this country if they please.

"Well, sir, as I said, Susan got better of her unhappiness by degrees, and when she found out that she could not have all she wished for, she made the best use of what she had, and by degrees

took more pleasure, and derived more comfort in our family prayer and Sunday worship than she could do at first. And when her mind was easy on this point, the rest soon followed; for in her case, as in all others, I have observed, that when a person really endeavours to do his duty, depending on the grace of God, and keeping a clear conscience, all goes quietly with him. She had also plenty to do, which is a great means to make one happy. There was the house to attend to, and the poultry to look after, of which we soon had a large flock, and found them very useful. As the boys grew up we began to clear the bit of wood-land my master gave me, and then we got, by degrees, a little farm of our own, and first of all bought a couple of sheep, which next year had two lambs apiece, and then we added a little cow; and so it went on, year by year. God blessed us in our work, and our flocks and herds increased, till at length our little property was so much larger, that I was obliged to give up my situation to attend to it, and, in my turn, had servants under me; some of whom, especially of the emancipated convicts, gave me so much trouble, that I was often tempted to wish myself back again in my former service."

"Are the emancipated convicts, I asked generally, a bad class?"

"Why, sir," replied John, "it is much the same with them as with others, there's good and bad of all sorts; and, no doubt, among the convicts that obtain their freedom, there are some very steady and reformed characters, but very often they are the reverse; and although some of them, by careful industry and good behaviour, get

to themselves a property, yet they are never looked upon as well as those who go out as free settlers."

"Do you see much of the convicts," I asked, "or know anything of their usual mode of life?"

"Yes, sir. At first going out, my master employed a gang of them, and, in some respects, we were answerable for their appearance. Some people here think that the convicts lead an easy, pleasant life, but such is far from the truth. They are placed under a careful superintendence, and generally are employed in laborious and painful work. Still, if they reform of their bad habits, and become good characters, as we call them, then, no doubt, their labours become less irksome; and if they are transported for only a certain limited period, for instance seven or fourteen years, on acquiring their freedom, they may, with steady conduct, do very well. Although, as I said, they are never looked upon with the same respect as are the free settlers.

"As I was saying, sir, our property gradually enlarged; and, after I had been out some twelve or fourteen years, I was quite a large landed proprietor, and then I resolved to do that which all along I had purposed, as soon as I had the means; namely, to build a church and provide a missionary for myself and neighbours.

"With this object, I went round to all that lived in the district, and was very glad to find that all whom I asked were quite ready to contribute to this work. Some promised money, and some timber, and others labour, or stones; and so we went on till I felt sure there would be no

difficulty in erecting the church. After this, I requested a certain number to put their names to a paper promising to give an annual sum towards the salary of a Missionary ; to this they all consented, and I sent my plans for building and endowing the church to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts—a Society, sir, which probably you will know ; and they, in turn, promised to send us out a clergyman, as soon as the church was finished and a residence ready for him, which we also undertook to build. In due time our plans were carried out, and, after two years work, we had the satisfaction of having a clergyman among us, to teach us the blessed truths of the Gospel, and administer the holy sacraments among us ; and we had also a nice little church, built after the fashion of one of the village churches of old England, wherein we might worship God as our fathers before us had done.

“ Since this event, little has occurred to alter the usual course of our life. We have a pastor whom we all love dearly, and whom we regard not only as our spiritual guide, but as a father and a friend ; and very thankful we al. are at the blessings we enjoy from his presence among us.

“ My wife is now reconciled to her lot, and is contented and happy, and the children, as I said, are growing up to be men, and likely, with God’s favour, to prove a source of comfort and happiness to their parents.

“ Such, sir, in brief, is the history of our life since we left England ; and, although we have suffered many anxieties, and undergone many

troubles, yet we have reason, indeed, to be thankful to that Gracious Being who has preserved us through them all, and will, I trust, in His own good time bring us to himself, for the sake of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."



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